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Firearms Experts on King Case

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Three firearms experts, including one from Long Island, will be on the team examining the bullet that killed Martin Luther King Jr.

The group will be led by Robert Hathaway, of Vernon, Conn., who heads the firearms section of the Rhode Island Crime Lab.

Marshall Robinson, 58 of Cheshire, Conn., a consultant to the Bridgeport, Conn., department's new Firearms Unit, was to travel to Rhode Island yesterday with the Bridgeport department's powerful new Leica microscope to work with Hathaway and George Reich, a firearms expert with the crime lab in the Suffolk County Medical Examiner's office. Today, the team will begin conducting tests on the rifle thought to be the murder weapon.

The team plans to fire the rifle and compare that bullet to the one taken from King's body. The \$45,000 microscope is the most advanced available in New

England and will be used to search for marks that identify a bullet as having been fired from a certain gun, officials said.

If the Leica microscope does not give the team the answers it is looking for, the evidence will travel to Pittsburgh, where a more powerful microscope is available.

The tests were requested by lawyers for James Earl Ray, convicted of the 1968 killing of the civil-rights leader. Ray's fingerprints were on the rifle found near the murder scene, but tests failed to prove it was the rifle used to shoot King. Ray pleaded guilty in 1969 but soon recanted. He now says the plea was coerced and that the gun was planted near the murder scene.

Ray, 69, who is serving a 99-year sentence, suffers from serious liver disease. Reports of his failing health have added urgency to calls for him to get a trial.